

Amendments to the Claims:

Claims 18, 30 - 32 and 34 have been amended herein. Please note that all claims currently pending and under consideration in the referenced application are shown below. Please enter these claims as amended. This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

1.-17. (Cancelled)

18. (Currently Amended) A ladder hinge and rail assembly comprising:
a first ladder rail;
a second ladder rail;
a first hinge component having a laterally extending hinge tongue, longitudinally extending rail mount section, and an abutment shoulder extending across substantially an entire width of the longitudinally extending rail mount section, wherein the longitudinally extending rail mount section of the first hinge component is partially longitudinally disposed within the first ladder rail;
a second hinge component having a lateral hinge groove and a longitudinally extending rail mount section, wherein the longitudinally extending rail mount section of the second hinge component is partially longitudinally disposed within the second ladder rail, and wherein the hinge tongue of the first hinge component is disposed within the hinge groove of the second hinge component and configured to provide relative rotation of the first and second hinge components about a defined axis from a first relative position of the first hinge component and the second hinge component to a second relative position of the first hinge component and the second hinge component, wherein the second relative position includes the first hinge component extending substantially longitudinally from the second hinge component and wherein the shoulder abutment abuts a surface of the second hinge component in a substantially conformal manner.

19. (Original) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein an internal cross-sectional periphery of the first rail is configured to interlock with and transmit an applied loading to the rail mount section of the first hinge component.

20. (Original) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 19, wherein an internal cross-sectional periphery of the second rail is configured to interlock with and transmit an applied loading to the rail mount section of the second hinge component.

21. (Previously presented) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein the rail mount section of the first hinge component includes a first reinforcement segment, a second reinforcement segment and a web segment extending therebetween, wherein the first and second reinforcement segments each exhibit a greater cross-sectional thickness than a cross-sectional thickness of the web segment.

22. (Previously presented) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein the first hinge component is configured as a unitary member.

23. (Cancelled)

24. (Previously presented) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein the second hinge component comprises an extruded member.

25.-27. (Cancelled)

28. (Previously presented) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 22, wherein the second hinge component is configured as a unitary member.

29 (Previously presented) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein

the first hinge component comprises an extruded member.

30. (Currently Amended) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein the longitudinally extending rail mount section of the first hinge component exhibits a varying cross-sectional geometry taken transverse to a longitudinal axis thereof, and wherein the longitudinally extending rail mount section of the first hinge component is partially longitudinally disposed within the first ladder rail in a substantially conformal and cooperatively mating relationship.

31. (Currently Amended) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 30, wherein the longitudinally extending rail mount section of the second hinge component exhibits a varying cross-sectional geometry taken transverse to a longitudinal axis thereof, and wherein the longitudinally extending rail mount section of the second hinge component is partially longitudinally disposed within the first ladder rail in a substantially conformal and cooperatively mating relationship.

32. (Currently Amended) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein the abutment ~~should~~ shoulder includes a substantially arcuate surface.

33. (Previously presented) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 32, wherein the abutment shoulder abuts the surface of the second hinge component along substantially the entire length of the arcuate surface.

34. (Currently Amended) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein the first hinge component and the second hinge component cooperatively define a beam ~~when if~~ when in the second relative position.